

230hh- Stilling Of All Activities

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(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

"Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him:

"Bhante, could a bhikkhu obtain such a state of composure (samadhi) that (1) he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body; (2) he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to all external significances; and (3) he would enter and dwell in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no more I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit for one who enters and dwells in it?"

"He could, Ānanda."

"But how, Bhante, could he obtain such a state of composure?"

"Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu thinks thus: 'This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities (sankharas), the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.' In this way, Ānanda, a bhikkhu could obtain such a state of composure that he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body; he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to all external significances; and he would enter and dwell in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no more I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit for one who enters and dwells in it." - An3.32

Stilling of *sankhāras* equates to *samadhi*, so practically, how would you then convey what *sankhāras* are? It's an important term, so how can you make it not so abstract? Most translations we find are not very practical, for example, when it's translated as 'determinations', you might ask yourself: "How do I calm determinations? Do I just refrain from determining anything? How am I even determining things, etc." There are some even more ambiguous translations such as 'mental formations' or 'energies', etc. But if we look at what is common to body-*kāya-sankhāras*, speech-*vacī-sankhāras* or mind-*citta-* or *mano-sankhāras*, what we find is that those things are movements, intentions, directions, pressures, forms of 'activities/activations' in the broadest sense of the term.

So how to be free from *sankhāras*? How to still all activities? It's not just about not doing anything to be free from *sankhāras* because abstaining from doing is your doing, that is also an activity. It's

about seeing the relationship between wholesome activities and not going into unwholesome activities, and then fundamentally removing a particular aspect from activities - the activity of ownership, which is the root of all problems, and that's exactly what the gradual training is all about. The first few steps- (1) keeping the precepts and (2) guarding the senses doors, are for the reducing of unwholesome activities; (3) Moderate in eating and (4) watchfulness - the activities that you do carefully; (5) Seclusion - not distracting yourself with work, talk, or company, i.e. moderating activities that you don't have to do unless they are necessary. You are still active in seclusion, you move around, you intend, clean, plan, etc, but now the background of those activities can become more obvious, more discernible because you are not distracted by coarser activities and that's exactly how you can begin to discern and still the fundamental activity based on ignorance, that of taking things as mine, taking things as belonging to me. The Buddha called it “*ahankāra* and *mamañkāra*” - I making and mine making.

“When, Sāriputta, a bhikkhu has no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body; when he has no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to all external significances/things; and when he enters and dwells in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no more I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit for one who enters and dwells in it, he is called a bhikkhu who has cut off craving, stripped off the fetter, and, by completely breaking through conceit, has made an end of suffering....” - [An3.33](#)

‘Mine-making’ is not ‘I chose to make this mine’, it’s on the level of being conscious towards things as if they are yours, including your ‘self’, so it is of course a subtle *sankhāra*, but if you have been practising the gradual training, it will be the most obvious thing. You take things as ‘mine’, that’s why ‘you’ are, it’s not the other way round. The activities, paired with ignorance, are there and that’s why you have a sense of self which you take as your own. Usually one thinks: ‘I am first’, ‘I am active’, ‘I am inactive’, “I am” equals things that are mine or not- mine. However, ‘Things are assumed to be yours first’ and that’s already an activity, an assumption which assumes ‘I am’. Activities are already there and you are already taking them implicitly as ‘towards you’, ‘for you’, and that’s why you have a sense of self. That sense of self, which is real as such, is dependent on that assumption of “for me” or “this is mine”, thus it is not-MY-self.

The removal of that assumption of ownership in regard to the activities, that you can only discern on account of withdrawing yourself from every single unwholesome activity of body, speech and mind, i.e. the gradual training, is peaceful, is sublime, is the stilling of all activities, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, *nibbāna*. When there is no *avijja* in regard to *sankhāras*, then *sankhāras* cease and the activities that are left are the activities on account of this conscious body and all external significances/things.